

# *Success Story*

## **Cleveland District Office**

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Joan Wenk was faced with a life changing dilemma in 1968. Her husband was facing a medical disability, and she had 3 children under the age of 5. She needed to work and take care of her children. Joan was disheartened by the lack of affordable child care. So, with her back against the wall, Joan started her own child care business. Now 40 years later, Joan can beam with pride at her accomplishments, and how successful her child care business has become.

Joan's company is called Creative Playrooms Montessori & Child Care Centers, and it now serves approximately 1,200 children at seven locations in the Cleveland, Ohio area. Creative Playrooms has grown into the largest privately owned child care corporation in Ohio, and the 14<sup>th</sup> largest in the nation. The company generates over \$1 million in annual revenue.

SBA has played a role in the company's growth, providing several loans along the way. The first was extended in 1971, when the Agency offered 5% interest direct loans to businesses that had been turned down for financing by at least two banks. Joan sought funding for a new building and a certified teacher to allow the business to begin offering kindergarten classes. Obtaining the required rejection letters was not difficult for Joan, and she readily recalls one banker refusing to even look at her loan application. With scuffed shoes and a hole in her pants, Joan turned to the SBA for a \$100,000 loan. The SBA official was not initially impressed with the business's annual income at the time of just \$41,000, openly wondering how it was surviving. Tuition for a child was only \$25 a week at that time. Somehow, Joan was able to convince SBA of the potential of the business, and it extended her the loan. Since that time, SBA has extended two additional loans to the business.

Joan Wenk has been a real pioneer, starting her child care business in 1968 when it was uncommon for a woman to own a business. She had some innovative ideas at the time, like transporting kids to and from the child care facility in her Oldsmobile station wagon. Innovative ideas continue today, with the centers offering many different classes and activities for enrollees, ranging from dance to tumbling lessons to even Spanish. Five of Joan's centers also have swimming pools, and swimming lessons are part of the curriculum.

Through it all, Joan has kept her strong work ethic, and her colleagues say her business has grown to what it is today because she has never lost focus. "It's all about the kids," states Joan.

Joan offers sage advice for those interested in starting a business. "You have to have passion, and put your whole heart into it," states Joan. "Do something you really like, and work as hard as you can."

Joan Wenk worked very hard and never gave up, and, as a result, her child care business has grown into a rousing success!